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Excerpts from recent
statements by
the Hon. Thomas Wells,
Minister of Education.

Unrestricted spending halted, but education remains a priority in Ontario

I know that there are some who feel that education no longer holds the pedestal position which it enjoyed during the golden Sixties. In those wonderful years, education clearly was in a priority position all over North America, and the start of it all was the Russian Sputnik in 1957.

Throughout this continent -- and nowhere more pointedly than in Ontario -- the public demand was to improve our schools, and money was judged the way to do it. Governments responded admirably, and public funds were soon available to do those things which educators said were necessary to bring our education systems quickly up to date.

Many benefits accrued to education -- to young people and the general public -- as a result of this new Number One priority position to which education had been suddenly elevated. Courses of study were expanded tremendously. New opportunities were offered to youngsters who previously had left school prematurely. Technical and vocational education came into its own, and pupil-teacher ratios fell dramatically.

By any measure, the priority placed upon education through the 1960's bore fruit. Our schools came a long way, and few people would deny that the changes that resulted were largely changes for the better.

Near the end of the Sixties, the same governments which a decade earlier had legislated greatly-increased financial support for education were becoming acutely aware that the huge annual

increases in education spending were threatening to bankrupt them in not too many years. So, one by one, decisions were made on how to slow things down without damaging all the good that had been achieved in the preceding years.

The result was an exhaustive study of the spending patterns of virtually every school board in the Province, which led ultimately to a basic Province-wide formula for per-pupil spending at the elementary and secondary school levels.

There was considerable flexibility built around these specific per-pupil spending figures -- the so-called weighting factors which allowed for special circumstances and situations faced by individual boards.

Obviously, the ceilings have had their intended financial effect in Ontario. And unlike other jurisdictions which are very close geographically to us, we have not suffered dire consequences.

This is not to say that certain programs have not been modified, or even cut down. This is not to say that various plans or expectations of teachers or schools or school boards have not had to wait, or be shelved. These things have happened in some cases. But reasonable people find it hard to see how this kind of effect should actually be harming our children.

We have reached the point where continued progress in education will not result from rapidly-increased spending -- but rather from creative innovation, efficient administration, the questioning of established and ritualized practices, and the imaginative reallocation of existing resources.

From an address to the Ontario Secondary School Headmasters Association

If schools weren't different, children would be the losers

It will be obvious to every parent here tonight that today's high schools are somewhat different from what most of us remember -- and this is how it should be. It is very doubtful that the kind of education we receive would adequately equip today's young people for tomorrow's world.

What we received may have been fine for the times. But this is 1973. When today's teenagers are about age 30, the year will 1985.

Our society will be very different then. We would be shortchanging our future generation if we were not adapting our schools today for tomorrow's world. If today's teachers did the same things in the same way as they did even 15 years ago, our children would be the losers.

*From an address at the official opening of
Bowmanville High School*



Some hopes for today's high school graduates

I hope you will continue to pursue excellence in the tasks you set for yourself, as you have done until now, and as so many fine graduates of this school have done in the past.

There is pleasure and real satisfaction in doing your best.

I hope you will find a career which you like, and which is satisfying to you, and that you will follow it vigorously and to the fullest extent of your ability -- taking pride in whatever major or minor accomplishments you attain.

At the same time, I hope you will always hold goals in front of you, for challenge is one of the essential spices of life.

I hope you will retain your ideals, but learn to temper them and change them as you gain more experience and more knowledge about all things.

I also hope -- and this is a much more specific wish -- I hope that you learn more about Canada, and come to understand the importance and the privilege of being a Canadian. I hope that you will soon have a chance to travel Canada, taking the time to know it better and appreciate it fully.

From an address to students at Upper Canada College

Teachers reinforce parents in setting a moral example

Most parents, including myself, hope that our children will develop a moral fibre and a sense of values that will give them strength and direction throughout their lifetimes.

We realize that discipline and moral guidance begin at home, and that a child's developing outlook on life depends primarily on the example set by parents and, to some extent, by friends. But we also realize that the school can and should extend this process in every possible way.

Teachers have a very serious responsibility to reinforce parents' efforts in this regard by setting an example for their students which is in keeping with the basic beliefs of the home and of society in general.

From a letter to the editor of the Toronto Daily Star



Credit system recognizes that all teens are not identical

The essential feature of the Credit System is that it recognizes -- finally -- that each high school student is a distinct individual, and that all students should not be treated as if they had identical capabilities, interests and ambitions.

Traditionally, the secondary school curriculum has been handed down from on high; the provincial Ministry of Education has dictated many of the subjects which students must take.

The assumption was, presumably, that there were experts who had all the answers -- who knew what was best for each student, and who knew which subjects would best equip each and every student for his future.

But in these fast-changing times, this is a false assumption. It is not possible for the Ministry of Education to specify a list of subjects which will answer the needs of each and every student in the Province.

Now, parents and students -- in close collaboration with the school -- can carefully choose a package of subjects each year that will best equip each individual student for his or her future.

If a student has plans to go on to university or college, his choice of high school subjects must relate to admission requirements. If a student plans to seek employment in a particular field, he can now choose those high school subjects which will best equip him for success.

Under the Credit System, each student is on an individual footing -- instead of being locked-in to a group of subjects laid down by the Ministry of Education.

While the so-called traditional subjects still form the backbone of the high school program, each student can now exercise reasonable flexibility in choosing his subjects to earn the minimum 27 credits required for graduation.

From an address at the official opening of Bowmanville High School

Education has changed enough for now

The changes that we have experienced in Ontario education in the last three years have been significant and far-reaching. They have involved alterations in educational philosophy, in financing, in organization, in attitudes -- every one of which, individually, is full of potential trauma -- and when taken together become a heavy burden for those who are not inclined to look upon change as a challenge.

I believe that this period of major change is just about at an end, for the time being.

What we face over the next few years will be a period of refinement, during which we will put the polish on the new structure which has been developed.

The net result, I predict, will be a marked improvement in the quality of the educational opportunities available to our young people, and very much in tune with what young people will need to get along successfully in the world they will face in the 1980's and beyond.

From an address to the Ontario Secondary School Headmasters Association



Schools can give the basis for bilingualism

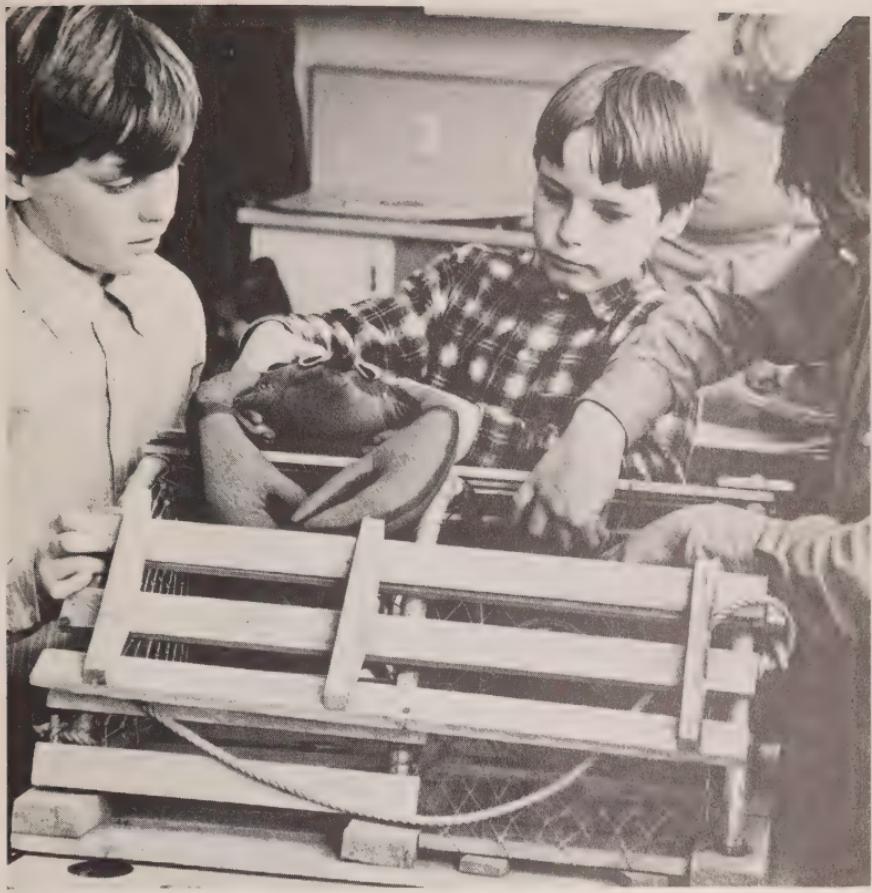
The teaching of French to English-speaking students has long been a matter of concern to many people. There is a considerable misunderstanding of what has been done and what can be done with this aspect of bilingualism.

It is evident that many people assume that the teaching of French to English-speaking pupils, in periods running from 20 to 40 minutes a day, will result in fluent bilingualism -- or that the mere introduction of some form of instruction in the French language fulfills our commitment to a bilingualism program.

These are misconceptions. Our experience tells us that what the schools can do is establish a sound basis for language skills.

The objective has been well-expressed by the Federal Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, which states that the schools should provide "an introduction to the language which would make it possible for the students to further develop or re-acquire the skills after leaving school. The school is the place where the capacity for bilingualism can be established. After graduation the individual will have the choice of which skills, if any, he wishes to develop, and the degree of perfection he wishes to acquire."

From a statement in the Ontario Legislature



Prejudice in textbooks

This question of prejudice in textbooks is a touchy business, and anyone who attempts to tackle the subject is apt to find himself accused of censorship, or trying to rewrite history, or something worse.

Let me say immediately that we are not talking about censorship, or anything like it. I am aware that bias which exists in textbooks is probably minor when compared with television, movies, library books, newspapers, and the daily acts of people.

Still, we are determined that the textbooks used in this Province will present a fair and accurate assessment of the accomplishments and achievements of all of the groups that make up our society, and we are taking some specific steps to ensure that they do.

One such measure was a study undertaken by the Ministry of Education to determine how much prejudice creeps into schoolbooks now. We examined more than 1,300 textbooks authorized for use in Ontario's schools; we were looking for specific examples of bias against particular ethnic groups.

The results of that study give some cause for satisfaction, and some cause for alarm. Of the 1,320 books that were read, most by at least two evaluators, 950 were found more-or-less free from bias. Of the remaining 370, most contained relatively few examples of prejudice. But some of those examples were abusive, and almost all were unnecessary.

From an address to the Canadian Association of Publishers' Educational Representatives.

We need to co-operate in planning and sharing schools

The broad matter of co-operation between public and separate school boards throughout the Province regarding the efficient provision of pupil places must be faced squarely.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform the House that today I am mailing a

memorandum to the Chairmen and Chief Executive Officers of each school board in Ontario which outlines a new procedure to ensure that all school boards serving a given geographic area will co-operate, consult and plan with each other on the matter of allocating school accommodation reasonably and efficiently.

Henceforth, before the Ministry will give grant approval for the construction of any new pupil places, the boards concerned with the geographic area will have to show evidence of real need and co-operative planning.

This means that representatives of the boards, using all available sources of information, must make the best possible projection of initial and/or future enrolments in that area.

Using these co-operative estimates, they will then work out a proposal by which their school accommodation requirements can be met. This may take the form of sharing facilities, the sale of facilities, or new construction.

At a time when school enrolments are falling or shifting in many areas -- and when there will be a sharp curtailment in the amount of money available for capital construction in education -- the Ministry of Education is not prepared to finance new school construction for any board if adequate vacant accommodation is available nearby.

However, I am confident that the educational objectives of all concerned will not be compromised by a determination to avoid waste in the use of school buildings -- and I believe that the people of Ontario share this view.

From a statement in the Ontario Legislature

Education legislation simplified

In certain respects, school law is like a living organism; it is constantly growing and decaying. Every year there are amendments to look after changed conditions and to improve existing provisions in the light of accumulating experience. As this process goes on, clauses and sections contradicting the revisions must be repealed or they will obviously cause trouble.

A less urgent matter, and one that is not always attended to immediately, involves the elimination of clauses that have merely become obsolete. If these are allowed to accumulate, they add unnecessarily to the bulk and complexity of the collection, and tend to make it more difficult for the would-be user.

It has been the practice for the Ministry to issue a bound collection of the five main acts about every three years, showing additions and sections repealed. These bound versions have had to be kept up to date by insertions and deletions.

This year, however, we are proposing a major consolidation of the five main school acts into a single systematized and up-to-date act.

This proposed consolidation of the five education acts is just that - a consolidation. There has been no attempt whatsoever to use it as a means to introduce broad changes of policy, which I am sure will become clear upon subsequent close examination.

To a meeting of school board chairmen

July 1973